



United States
Office of Personnel Management

Social Work Series

GS-0185

**Workforce Compensation and Performance Service
Office of Classification Programs
December 1997, HRCD-4**

Social Work Series

GS-0185

CONTENTS

SERIES DEFINITION	1
EXCLUSIONS	1
DISTINCTIONS FROM RELATED FIELDS	1
COVERAGE OF THE STANDARD	2
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	2
GRADE-DISTINGUISHING ELEMENTS	6
GRADE-LEVEL CRITERIA	11
SOCIAL WORKER, GS-0185-07	11
SOCIAL WORKER, GS-0185-09	12
SOCIAL WORKER, GS-0185-11	14
SOCIAL WORKER, GS-00185-12	16

SERIES DEFINITION

This series includes positions which require application of a professional knowledge of the principles and practices of social work in the performance of such assignments as providing direct services to individuals and families, including work with individuals in groups. Also included are positions concerned with teaching social work, doing research on social work problems, training of social work students, and providing consultation and advice to members of related professions and community organizations on social work questions.

This standard supersedes and replaces the standard for this series which was issued in September 1956 and revised in June 1957, and which was specifically applicable to social work positions in a clinical setting.

EXCLUSIONS

Excluded from this series are those positions concerned with providing authorized social assistance and services to beneficiaries of public welfare programs when such work is of a specialized nature that requires a knowledge of program policy and operation rather than the application of professional social work knowledge and skill. (See the [Social Services, Series, GS-0187](#).)

Also excluded from this series are positions concerned with Federal participation in and support of social welfare programs administered by States, local communities, or voluntary organizations. (See the [Social Administration Series, GS-0102](#).)

Positions which involve performance of correctional treatment in penal and correctional institutions but which do not require application of professional knowledge of the principles and practices of social work are excluded from this series. Such positions are properly allocable to the [Social Science Series, GS-0101](#) (to be filled under the Correctional Treatment Specialist option of that series), when they require application of specialized professional knowledge of the behavioral and social sciences as they relate to criminology and corrections. The classification standard for the Social Work Series should be used for cross-series comparison in the classification of positions of Correctional Treatment Specialists when the duties of such positions are like those of professional social work.

DISTINCTIONS FROM RELATED FIELDS

For discussion of distinctions between certain kinds of work done by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and others, see the standard for the [Psychology Series, GS-0180](#).

COVERAGE OF THE STANDARD

This standard is immediately applicable to classification of nonsupervisory social work positions in which the primary emphasis is on direct professional service to individuals and families. Positions principally concerned with other methods of service or with research or teaching social work should be classified by comparison with the grade-level criteria in this standard and by reference to related standards. Supervisory positions should be classified in accordance with the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This portion of the standard contains: (A) explanatory information on the major changes from the superseded standard, and (B) occupational information on the work of the series.

A. Changes from previous standard

This revision of the standard for social work (1) discontinues former specializations, and (2) redefines the series to limit coverage to positions that require professional education in social work.

- (1) *Former specializations.* -- This standard drops the six former social work specializations (Clinical, Child Welfare, Family Service, Correctional, Public Assistance, and General) to reflect recent changes in the occupation that have reduced the importance of distinctions related to fields of experience.

Until the 20 years ago, the profession of social work was a composite of different fields of practice that emphasized particular knowledges and skills required by the specialized programs of various social welfare agencies to work in different settings (hospitals, correctional institutions, courts, etc.) and serve different groups of people (children, patients, aged, delinquent juveniles, etc.). More recent trends in social work education have emphasized a common core of social work knowledge and methods applicable in any setting and with any client group.

At present, the Commission on Accreditation of the Council on Social Work Education recognizes both general educational objectives that apply to all professional practice and three concentrations within the curriculum related to particular methods of practice and problem solving processes associated with services (a) to individuals and families, (b) to groups, and (c) to communities. Concentrations of instructions in administration or research are similarly recognized.

These recognized social work methods do not imply specialized subdivisions of practice. Social workers who are mainly engaged in working with individuals and families also work with clients in groups. The family itself is a small group. Social workers who are thought of as group workers usually work simultaneously with individuals who make up the

groups. The fact that the problems of individuals, groups, and communities are interwoven makes it necessary for social workers to employ appropriate methods in their practice as the occasion warrants.

- (2) Professional social work as a separate series. -- The Social Work Series is limited to those positions that require a master's degree from an accredited school of social work and excludes positions for which there were alternative requirements under former occupational standards. The distinction between positions that require professional social work knowledge and skill and positions in social welfare agencies that can be fully performed by persons with other qualifications has been defined in this standard primarily in terms of qualification requirements. Whether a given position actually requires the services of a professional social worker will often depend upon how the position is defined by management and whether there is a stated basis for requiring that the incumbent's actions be based on professional rather than empirical methods. This change recognizes the need of Federal welfare programs for administrative flexibility in working out staffing patterns for division of responsibility between professional social workers and other employees.

B. Occupational information -- professional social work

In developing this standard it has been necessary to direct our attention to the kinds of social work positions that predominate in Federal employment. Most of these positions are thought of as engaged in professional casework in the specific sense that their first purpose is to provide direct social work services to individuals and families. The term "casework" is used in this particular sense to designate practice associated with service to individuals and families as distinguished from methods of problem solving and prevention associated with group practice, work with community organizations, administration, consultation, research, etc.

Social work is oriented to professional practice and is primarily concerned with individual cases rather than with social problems as abstractions. Its knowledge and skill are applied to helping individuals and families find satisfactory ways of coping with their social situations and relationships. This concern is at the root and core of the historical values and professional identity of social work.

Research in social work is focused on producing valid and generalized knowledge for social work practice. The area of this research centers on the social functioning of individuals and families. It may range from studies of specific aspects of the methods and techniques used in social work practice to studies of a variety of social processes involving the individual and his environment. This research is for the purpose of improving professional practice.

The social worker's problem is one of finding suitable means to help individuals and families whose immediate situation creates more stress than they can deal with effectively. The stress to which an individual is exposed and his resources to cope with it are the elements that the social worker must consider in helping the client arrive at a practical solution of his problem. Minor

deprivations can create serious problems for those who are particularly vulnerable, e.g., the socially handicapped and those who are young and helpless or debilitated by age or illness. Ordinary pressures of living may cause acute problems for markedly vulnerable personalities. Individuals with superior resources (e.g., intelligence, education, motivation, family support) can often deal with circumstances that are of themselves marginally critical (e.g., loss of income, illness) without outside help. Some situations (e.g., separation from a child) are likely to be critical for anyone, regardless of resources.

The social worker's professional practice is apt to be concerned with the welfare of people who are exposed to deprivation involving considerable risk of personality damage or emotional involvement which requires particular caution to prevent or minimize destructive consequences. It often involves finding practical accommodations to the demands of living for individuals with modified capacities. Clients who have been conditioned by long and serious deprivation may be incapable of using practical assistance or community resources to solve their problems unless they are supplemented by rehabilitative services and the interest, concern, and guidance of personalized counseling. Highly individualized services may be necessary for personalities that are too demoralized, alienated, psychologically isolated, etc., to benefit from conventional supportive measures (too discouraged to follow suggestions, if not unwilling to entertain them, etc.).

The normal pattern of professional social work includes interviewing people to establish the nature and extent of their problems, helping them work out plans for improving the situation, providing assistance and services, referring them to community resources and other organizations as indicated, and assisting them to understand and modify their own patterns of behavior when appropriate.

Broadly speaking, there are three major phases of activity that make up the action sequence of the casework process, namely: (1) identifying the problem, (2) deciding appropriate action, and (3) providing indicated services. In practice, the whole information-decision-action sequence is integrated into continuous operating activity. In social work literature, these steps are often called study, diagnosis, and treatment.

In the initial factfinding step, the social worker explores with the person concerned both the pertinent facts in his case and the significance he gives to them. The interview is used to establish facts about the situation, its nature, cause, components, and impact, while at the same time learning enough about the person affected to understand correctly its present and potential consequences to him.

Once the problem is seen clearly and accurately assessed, the second step is planning appropriate action. Based on the facts at his disposal, his knowledge of agency and community resources, and his appraisal of the probable responses of the people concerned, the caseworker makes the initial and continuing decisions that determine the content and direction of agency services. This decision step is concerned with establishing what the social worker considers it is necessary to try to accomplish with the client, and how he plans to go about it.

The casework process culminates in action to provide indicated services, authorize benefits, make referrals, give advice, guidance, emotional support and other assistance to program beneficiaries consistent with agency objectives. The service often involves leading the client or members of his family to air and explore repressed feelings, consider new and different ideas, and reexamine choices and their consequences so that they can identify and redirect actions that would be destructive to themselves and others.

A continuing element of casework is the purposefully therapeutic relationship through which the social worker sustains the client during their joint engagement with his problem.

The same professional concepts, principles, and techniques are used by social workers regardless of the program in which they work, but the circumstances and details of assignments and the immediate occasions of service differ among the various social welfare programs of different agencies. Some representative assignments of social workers in programs concerned with designated groups of people are as follows:

In programs for the protection of children, social workers are assigned to investigate reports of harmful conditions affecting their welfare, provide casework services on behalf of children and their parents in their own homes, evaluate suitability of foster home and adoption applicants, place children in institutions, foster homes, or adoptive homes and furnish continuing casework services to children who are wards of the agency and to their families.

In programs of service to juvenile court cases, they are assigned to conduct social studies on complaints filed on juveniles, evaluate social factors and recommend disposition of cases, supervise juveniles on probation, and furnish continuing casework services for probationers and members of their families.

In programs of service to patients in hospitals, field health stations, and clinics, they evaluate and make known to medical staff social factors relating to illness, hospitalization, diagnosis and recommended treatment of patients, carry responsibility for social work aspects of integrated treatment programs, and furnish continuing social work services to patients and their families while they are learning to live with illness or disability of a family member.

In programs of service to Indians living on reservations, they provide continuing casework services for Indian individuals, families, and children; consultation and assistance to tribal courts. They work with tribal councils and community groups to facilitate the development of programs on the reservation to meet identified problems.

In programs for the rehabilitation of inmates of correctional institutions, they develop personal histories of new inmates, evaluate social factors related to their adjustment in the institution and in their outside environment, and make reports in connection with pre-sentencing investigations. They make recommendations to classification committees for changes in the inmate's program and activities and provide continuing casework services to inmates in connection with personal and family problems and pre-release planning.

In programs of public assistance, they evaluate social factors and recommend disposition of cases of clients with complex social problems related to deprivation and furnish casework services to clients on a continuing basis when they are unable to make use of agency and community resources without personalized guidance and support.

GRADE-DISTINGUISHING ELEMENTS

The characteristics of assignment content and supervisory control recognized by this standard as typical of each grade level are used in the descriptions of classes of social work positions. In applying the provisions of the standard to specific cases, the intent of the standard as a whole should be interpreted in the light of the following discussion of the nature of professional decisions and services, and the different purposes of supervision.

Nonsupervisory casework increases in grade level with the difficulty of the professional decisions and services required by the assignment and the independence of supervisory control typical of the incumbent's performance. Two basic variables that affect the grade level of nonsupervisory positions in this series are: *the character of the caseload*, i.e., the difficulty of the problems present in the assignment and the degree of professional skill and judgment required by the social work decisions and services they involve; and *the freedom of practice characteristic of performance*, i.e., the extent to which the social worker's recognized competence is reflected in decreased supervisory control that allows independent performance of work.

It is not generally feasible to sort social work cases in advance for difficulty and assign more difficult cases to more experienced workers because complications may not be evident until after the case is undertaken. Nor is it ordinarily feasible to reassign cases after it becomes apparent that they are "difficult" because of the recognized advantages of a sustained relationship between the worker and the client. Transfer of the casework relationship from one worker to another may be planned for in the case management program at certain intervals that permit reassignment without loss of service to the client (e.g., following the intake process in cases that can be diagnosed early). However, the same social worker usually has continuing responsibility for service to any particular person he works with, and members of his family if they are involved. Social workers are normally assigned overall responsibility for groups of cases, the unit of work being an assigned case, with the total assignment ordinarily designated in terms of responsibility for active cases in some type of physical concentration of client residence or location that will facilitate access, reduce travel time, etc.

These characteristics of the assignment pattern tend to equalize assignment content, with the result that differences in levels at which social workers function are related primarily to essential differences in the way their work is guided and reviewed. The limitations in professional skill and judgment typical of relatively inexperienced social workers more often result in increased control and guidance by the supervisor than in appreciably restricted difficulty of casework activities assigned. As the supervisor recognizes the worker's increasing competence in casework practice, he decreases control of more difficult decisions and services. However, unless serious

professional problems are characteristically present in an assignment, relaxed supervision alone obviously does not connote delegation of responsibility for difficult decisions and services.

Person-to-person relationships

The professional relationships with clients and their families and other people concerned in their lives are an integral part of the social work process. The decision and action of the worker and the reaction of the client are closely interrelated because many of the problems of professional service involve accomplishing changes in insights, attitudes, and motivations of clients in order to help them modify behavior that is contributing to their problems in successful living. When the client will respond with confidence to worker acceptance, interest, and encouragement, many social work services are relatively easily performed. It becomes more difficult to maintain an effective service relationship when the people involved are unresponsive or hostile to the worker, and indifferent to or afraid of his activities on their behalf. For example, if the client can make a valid appraisal of his situation and has no marked adaptive behavioral patterns that interfere with discussing it frankly and realistically, his problem can be readily explored. On the other hand, pertinent facts may be difficult to establish if the reported problem is not the causal or primary one and the client is unwilling or unable to expose the real actuating elements in his basic problem. Some of the considerations which affect the difficulty of identifying the problem initially and in maintaining an effective working relationship are: hostile behavior of a client in interview, defensive maneuvers to protect information he considers private or to avoid interference with rewarding parts of his life, and misinformation, whether given deliberately to mislead the worker or honestly because of limited understanding of the situation. If the social worker should be misled as to the facts of the situation and the feelings of the client, errors in judgment and action would be inevitable.

Basic interviewing skills include communicating acceptance, interest, and encouragement, and selective use of questioning, explanation, and guidance in working with clients to help them explore their problems. The social worker's interest in information about the client is an objective professional concern with finding out what is wrong and deciding with the client what should be done to help him deal with his problem. To do this, it is necessary to create a comfortable atmosphere in interviews, and help the client overcome anxiety by acts of reassurance, maintaining a relaxed manner, and making use of voice tone, gesture, silence, questioning and suitable comment to encourage or discourage response and get quickly to the problem. Through observation of the client's behavior, the worker is expected to identify obvious fears, anxieties, defense mechanisms and similar factors of attitude that may have a bearing on his total situation and his reporting of it. In working with the client toward the best way of dealing with his problems, the social worker employs casework methods and techniques to maintain a therapeutic relationship that will help him reach that goal.

The new professional worker who has been doing supervised casework as part of his graduate training should have acquired considerable skill in the use of the more basic techniques of establishing a non-judgmental, accepting atmosphere and maintaining a therapeutic relationship by acts of reassurance and objectivity that help the client explore his problem and sort out its

elements. At the GS-9 level he is expected to use these basic skills to demonstrate tolerance and understanding toward hostile behavior and expression of charged feelings in order to work realistically with underlying problems, and to make selective use of various ways of helping the client gain enough awareness to handle himself and his problems more effectively. At this level, supervisory instruction will be directed to the development of greater facility and flexibility in the use of more advanced skills.

(Provision is made at the GS-7 level for positions of new professional workers who are receiving practice training in person-to-person relationships as well as other methods and techniques of practice essential to the assignment. For example, a social worker who concentrated his student practice in community organization during his graduate study and then wished to work in direct service to individuals and families would need enough supervised practice training to develop facility in his professional relationships with clients before he would be able to perform above the GS-7 level.)

Mastery of the whole range of treatment skills and sound judgment in their use is assumed at the GS-11 level, although this is an area in which social workers continue to grow and develop professionally through practice. Some of the more difficult therapeutic techniques require marked skill in their use and in perception of their effect to insure that they do help the client toward solving his problems and do not disturb his useful defenses. The most difficult professional relationships are those in which the behavioral adjustments of the people served seriously interfere with acceptance of available help. Great skill and understanding are necessary to achieve the desired results.

Decisions and commitments

Professional social work intervention is not ordinarily required when the problem is a straightforward one of obvious needs that can be readily dealt with in terms of clearly authorized agency services which the client wishes to use and from which there is little doubt that he will benefit (e.g., need for better housing or medical prosthesis).

Professional decisions and judgments in social work usually concern problems as to appropriate action that involve serious consequences to the individuals who are served. More difficult decisions are required when agency policy is ambiguous, latitude for judgment increases, relevant considerations multiply, client reaction becomes less predictable, or success in achieving beneficial results is less certain. Individual decisions with relatively unpredictable results must often be made tentatively on a somewhat experimental basis subject to prompt modification as indicated by subsequent developments.

Professional judgments usually concern difficult decisions that can have serious consequences to the person who is served, and the weight of responsibility tends to increase with the seriousness of the effect on the client's situation (e.g., recommending actions that involve separating family members or committing people to institutions).

The professional social worker's trained judgment is the basis of his decision as to what the client's needs are and how they can best be dealt with in order for him to achieve a workable method of coping with the problems of living that confront him. When the worker has identified sources of stress that are contributing to the client's problem, his own knowledge of ways of facing and neutralizing some of the factors enables him to decide what kind of plan to undertake with the client and how to go about putting it into action. In complicated cases the decision is usually made tentatively and reviewed and revised continuously in the course of service based on client and family response.

The most difficult professional decisions are those concerned with complex problems that require highly individualized treatment in situations where failure to help the client will have serious consequences for him and success is highly dependent on the validity of the social worker's diagnostic judgment as well as his skillful handling of services.

Supervisory control

Supervisory involvement in the casework process combines educational responsibilities for furthering the professional growth of the worker with operational responsibilities for insuring the adequacy and effectiveness of actions taken by him. Because supervision has the dual purpose of insuring sound action in important matters and developing staff capabilities, supervisory direction tends to be educational in method even when its purpose is operational control of action in individual cases.

The social worker comes to his first professional assignment with a substantial body of knowledge and skill gained in graduate study that has included supervised field practice. The supervisor builds on this foundation of competence through regular conferences and discussions to explain assignments, review progress of cases, and consider the worker's recommendations.

During the orientation phase, the supervisor concentrates on clarifying the agency's place in the community and its philosophy of service, its commitments, organizational relationships and goals, and guiding the worker into application of the policies and use of the resources of the agency and community within program methods and means. The supervisor may also be concerned with strengthening the worker's objectivity and his identification with the agency mission, or increasing his understanding of the attitudes, behavior, and needs of the people normally encountered in the course of its operations.

When the worker is familiar with the agency, the supervisor concentrates on improving his facility in the use of more advanced techniques of practice and helping him develop more penetrating judgment in assessing situations and planning appropriate action.

The supervisor keeps informed of the progress of cases under his operational control and identifies and participates in all serious decisions made by workers at the GS-9 level. Initially, he gives strong supportive and directional guidance on all decisions. As he recognizes evidence that the worker is taking all relevant considerations into account and making consistently valid

judgments, the supervisor's control of decisions is more apt to be exercised in the form of active concurrence.

The experienced professional social worker who has become versatile in his use of service skills and has learned to make and take responsibility for sound professional decisions is allowed freedom of action in dealing with individual cases that are difficult and demanding. The social worker at the GS-11 level is expected to keep his superiors informed of the progress of his work, and to recognize and call to their attention any developments of professional or program interest, such as unusual aspects of individual cases or evidence of shifting trends within his caseload. Only when the social worker asks for consultation about problematical decisions in serious cases does the supervisor normally participate in consideration of alternatives and confirm or influence the conclusions as to appropriate action of a senior social worker.

The grade-level criteria do not describe a GS-10 level. However, there may be room for positions to substantially exceed the GS-9 level as described without fully meeting the GS-11 level, as described. Positions which do not fully meet the GS-11 level should not be evaluated at that level simply because they are "better than" GS-9. There is nothing to preclude the use of GS-10 in such cases.

GRADE-LEVEL CRITERIA

SOCIAL WORKER, GS-0185-07

GS-7 social worker positions usually represent initial assignments for new professional workers whose preparation has not included supervised training in the methods of practice to be regularly used in carrying out the assigned duties. Social work assignments at grade GS-7 are the exception rather than the rule because social workers usually choose positions that involve methods of practice in which they have concentrated their field practice during graduate study. In typical assignments at this level, emphasis is on providing practice in casework methods and a variety of casework services are performed under close supervisory guidance and control for training.

At this level the social worker conducts interviews with clients, relatives, and others to obtain pertinent information to be incorporated in the social case history as background for planning indicated services, develops initial tentative conclusions as to appropriate services, and carries out such services as may be authorized by the supervisor. During interviews, the social worker gives information to the client, answers factual questions, and gives explanations and interpretations of agency policies and procedures that concern the client.

The results of each interview are discussed with the supervisor to examine the significance of facts secured, including any questions of their reliability, to examine the validity of the worker's impression of the behavior and motivations of the people interviewed, and to identify any clues the worker may have overlooked or any personal bias that may have influenced him. The worker is expected to draw conclusions and to make recommendations for appropriate agency action with

reference to cases he works with. Recommendations are discussed thoroughly with the supervisor before conclusions as to appropriate services to clients are confirmed. These discussions involve consideration of consequences of various courses of action, expectation of their effect under the circumstances, variations in client response to such action, and finally the supervisor's reasons for his decision to concur in or modify the recommendation from his own knowledge of the background of such cases and his experience with similar problems.

At this level the social worker may carry out definite services that can be approved in advance as appropriate, as in helping newly assigned residents understand and accept the routine of an institution.

Note: These assignments are similar to the closely supervised practice performed for training by graduate students while they are working in an agency during field placement.

SOCIAL WORKER, GS-0185-09

GS-9 positions are characterized by substantial professional responsibility for providing social work services which are actively supervised when they involve performance of difficult services in complicated cases, and are performed under relaxed supervision with considerable independence of action when they involve conventional services in cases of limited difficulty.

All professional work at grade GS-9 presents a definite need for effective use of a variety of social work skills and the exercise of informed professional judgment in the process of assisting clients to face their problems, think them through, evaluate the situation realistically, consider alternative courses of action in relation to their needs and circumstances, and arrive at plans for using their resources to deal with the situation. Many positions at this level combine difficult services performed under continuing supervisory guidance with routine professional work performed under relaxed supervisory control. Independence of action, alone, will not take a position out of grade GS-9 when the content of the assignment is limited to relatively conventional professional decisions and services.

Assignments at this level normally include a fairly representative cross section of the cases dealt with by the agency. Work typically involves services to clients with a variety of psycho-social and environmental problems. Assignments are usually made in terms of continuing responsibility for providing social work services as required in a designated subdivision of program operations, such as to patients or wards or inmates in a related group of housing units or quarters or to residents of a section of a city or a reservation or similar administrative segment of the agency's operating services. Work is subject to active supervisory control and review through regularly scheduled conferences, with particular attention to those aspects of more complex cases which are recognized as unusually demanding.

The GS-9 social worker makes an independent evaluation of the client's situation, including the client's reaction to it and ability to deal with it, and arrives at a reasoned conclusion as to the preferred course of agency action that is indicated in the case from a social work point of view.

However, at grade GS-9, social workers work within some limitations as to the difficulty of services that would be undertaken and decisions implemented without prior consultation with the supervisor for his concurrence.

For example, when the client is in the care or custody of an institution where decisions as to changes in his status are made by a responsible staff committee to whom the social worker makes recommendations, the supervisor would usually review the social worker's assessment of the case and his recommendations for client treatment to insure that conclusions drawn were appropriate and fully substantiated before the social worker presented them to the committee for action. In assignments of experienced social workers, as described at grade GS-11, considerably more independence of action is expected in making recommendations of this serious nature.

GS-9 social workers are normally required to work with complex cases and to make difficult decisions based on exercise of professional judgment in such matters as deciding what in a client's way of dealing with his situation is the best that should be expected under the circumstances, when compensatory behavior and limited insights should be left undisturbed as necessary defenses in coping with day-to-day problems, and whether positive benefit can be realistically expected as a result of changes in attitude and perspective. The worker must know what to look for and be able to explore and clarify pertinent facts and attitudes when misleading information is given by clients with limited understanding of their circumstances and feelings. Except for professional judgment, precedents for appropriate action are ambiguous and their application assumes considerable knowledge of the nature of normal and abnormal behavior, the causes and consequences of deprivation, the undermining, stabilizing, and strengthening factors in social circumstances and interaction, and the cultural and psychological implications of family disunity, unemployment, illness, delinquency, functional illiteracy, etc.

Cases often involve services to clients who require support and guidance in dealing with their problems to avoid serious personal difficulties when effective reinforcement can help the person make more constructive choices and overcome obstacles through increased ability to recognize, accept, and come to grips with his own situation.

In establishing and maintaining suitable relationships with those they serve, incumbents are responsible for effective use of professional skill, objectivity, and insight. Clients may be seeing a social worker because they are required to, and be completely antagonistic, indifferent, or evasive. It is the responsibility of the GS-9 social worker to deal constructively with both positive and negative reactions, understand disparate values, and reach clients from different social backgrounds and ethnic groups, communicate confidence in their ability and worth, and help them deal with their problems.

Supervision is normally exercised through regularly scheduled conferences and review of records, reports, and correspondence. The supervisory conference is for the purpose of discussing difficult or problem cases, evaluating effectiveness of work, and providing guidance as the need is indicated. By questions, suggestions, and explanations, the supervisor enables the worker to make a more penetrating assessment of cases with implications he has not grasped and to see the

appropriateness of a different conclusion than he first proposed. The supervisor maintains rather close operational control of decisions and services when the worker is dealing with serious problems demanding unusual skill and judgment, but allows freedom of action to the social worker at this level in the relatively routine activities of professional practice.

In addition to direct performance of social work service, GS-9 positions may include incidental responsibility for giving supervisory direction to members of the technical and clerical staff.

SOCIAL WORKER, GS-0185-11

GS-11 positions involve intensive social work services requiring the exercise of mature professional judgment and the flexible use of a wide range of social work skills. This level represents performance of services in serious and complicated cases with demonstrated effectiveness based on sufficient training and experience to require a minimum of supervisory control and guidance and permit independent exercise of authoritative judgment. GS-11 social workers carry full professional responsibility for cases presenting a wide range of psycho-social and environmental problems with no limitations as to the difficulty of services that would be performed.

Illustrative of such difficult cases are situations involving sociopathic personalities and family groups who react to their circumstances with impulsive behavior that may be self-destructive or predatory. Such a person may be a delinquent, a source of family and child-rearing problems, or a center of disturbance and deterioration in school and neighborhood groups, etc., because of his chronically defective behavior. Such personalities are hard to reach and the problems around them are difficult to deal with and challenge social work methods and techniques of bringing individuals to want and use help in achieving self-satisfying and socially satisfactory lives.

At this level, the social worker makes independent professional decisions and recommendations for agency actions that can have serious impact on the life of the person served, as, for example, in separating members of families, approving adoptive parents and placement of children, placing delinquents in protective custody, recommending placement of a patient in a nursing home rather than return to his own family, etc. When recommendations of this serious and problematical nature originate with incumbents of lower grade positions, they are normally reviewed by the supervisor in advance of action, as described at grade GS-9.

The responsibility for reaching independent conclusions as to appropriate action can make exceptional demands on the worker's professional judgment when consequences to the client are serious and results are relatively unpredictable. Client situations are often complicated by conflicting needs that are difficult to resolve even by highly individualized planning. For example, when a social worker is called upon to decide whether a child is in need of protection and should be removed from the home, or whether keeping the family together and providing supportive services can achieve the child's best welfare and greater common benefit to the family, the social worker's responsibility for recommending appropriate actions tests his understanding of parental motivations involved. His conclusions will depend largely on his considered professional

judgment as to whether or not, for example, neglectful and abusive behavior of the child's parents makes it unsafe for the child or whether parental response to him can be modified and redirected with the child in the home.

Techniques of service that are involved in the effectiveness of social work practice at this level frequently demand highly developed professional skills, as, for example, in motivating a psychiatric patient with a marginal adjustment toward resuming more effective control of his own life through a therapeutic relationship with the worker, or through insights gained in group therapy led by his peers with the social worker's oversight and guidance.

In GS-11 assignments, difficult professional services to clients with serious problems are not an incidental part of the workload but are regularly performed on a continuing basis with infrequent recourse to supervisory guidance. The supervisor is kept informed of the progress of the work and is available for consultation on substantive problems. The GS-11 social worker is accountable for identifying problems that should be brought to the attention of his supervisor, and for taking the initiative in determining that the supervisor should be consulted and the purpose of the conference. Some consultation is primarily to help the worker maintain perspective under the day-to-day impact of seriously troubled clients and the limitations of his own and the agency's resources.

GS-11 social workers may have responsibility for independently giving interpretations of case histories to judges of courts and members of boards, for presenting case studies at conferences of staff teams for their use in reaching decisions as to indicated medical, correctional, or psychiatric treatment, and for making recommendations that can be relied on for soundness of judgment and maturity of insight on problem cases.

GS-11 social workers characteristically participate actively in program planning and in the development and maintenance of public understanding and sound working relationships with local agencies and community resources. They assume responsibility for coordination with teachers, clergymen, lawyers, physicians, and representatives of other disciplines who are concerned with the same client or group of clients. Also typical of assignments at this level is the presence of responsibility for the exercise of initiative in community relations work involved in influencing public attitude and action toward employment, home care, social acceptance and support of clients who are parolees, members of different ethnic groups, released psychiatric patients, etc.

As assigned, GS-11 social workers supervise the practice of social work students placed in the unit for training.

Some assignments at grade GS-11 are positions of social workers who spend a significant amount of time in direct performance of social work typical of grade GS-11 as described above, and concurrently supervise the work of one or two less experienced social workers. Such positions normally do not have significant program management responsibility.

Also included at GS-11 are assignments involving responsibility for providing continuing social work services at a field location alone or with one or two subordinate social workers or social work associates without a supervisor available for consultation. Such assignments typically involve travel in an assigned territory and require extensive coordination of service with a wide range of residents of various communities such as local lawyers, physicians, and public officials, and with local social agencies.

SOCIAL WORKER, GS-00185-12

GS-12 social worker positions are of two general types, namely (1) supervisory positions that include full technical and administrative responsibility for the accomplishment of the work of a unit of three or more subordinate professional workers when the base level of work supervised fully meets the description of grade GS-11 in this standard; and (2) positions which are classified at this level in recognition of program responsibilities which are significant enough to justify grade GS-12 with or without the presence of professional subordinates.

Illustrative of positions of the second type are:

- those of social workers in charge of the social work program at a separate installation or similar organizational component where they are responsible for development and maintenance of professional standards of service, initiating and effecting changes in methods that will promote efficient practice, and coordination of social work services with other programs of service to the same group of clients. Such positions typically are responsible for representing the social work program at conferences and in contacts with other agencies and the public. Work is subject to regulation and procedural direction from the program directors in the central office of the agency and to the local management control of the directors of the institutions such as hospitals and clinics and correctional institutions.
- those of social workers responsible for serving various beneficiary groups scattered over a large geographical area when assignments include direct social work practice in cases with complex problems, organization of community services on behalf of beneficiaries, development and coordination of procedures for the use of these community services by related staffs and satellite facilities, and development and maintenance of working relationships and agreements with other organizations having responsibilities for the same groups of people.

Basic responsibility for a program of social work services does not justify classification at grade GS-12 unless there is substantial accountability for program effectiveness, modification of service patterns, and promoting acceptance of the social work function. As distinguished from positions at grade GS-11 which are responsible for providing continuing social work services at a field location, positions classified at grade GS-12 on the basis of program responsibilities characteristically combine program development and evaluation with service functions.